

November 8, 1971

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

PROJECT PROPOSAL

TITLE: THE NEW AMERICAN PAINTING: The 'Forties and 'Fifties

PROPOSED BY: Waldo Rasmussen

BACKGROUND:

For many years The Museum of Modern Art has received requests from Latin American institutions for a major exhibition of painting in the United States during the postwar period. Such requests now date back over a decade, initially in response to the great influence of such exhibitions as "The New American Painting" and "Jackson Pollock" in Europe during the late 1950s. Later developments in the art of the United States have been followed with great interest by the art community of Latin America, but still no major group exhibitions of our avant-garde painters and sculptors have been shown, except in the representations to the Sao Paulo Bienal in Brazil.

Political considerations have played a part in the chequered history of the proposed exhibition, since anti-U.S. feeling in Latin America and its possible repercussions have had to be taken into account both by the Museum and the Latin American exhibitors. Meanwhile since 1964 the International Program has sent 16 exhibitions on tour in Latin America, and the increasing internationalism of content in these exhibitions places an exhibition of American painting in another context.

It is now proposed to contact our Latin American colleagues and to determine when a major exhibition on developments in postwar art in the U. S. could be scheduled. The Council's Latin American Sub-Committee is being asked to consider this proposal carefully, and especially to review the scope of such an exhibition.

DESCRIPTION:

It is suggested here that with the wide scope of American art during the postwar period, no single exhibition could do more than indicate leading directions. An exhibition covering American art from Gorky to earthworks would have to be enormous in scale to provide adequate coverage, and few Latin American museums have sufficient space for such an exhibition.

As an alternative, it is proposed to organize an exhibition concentrating on the "breakthrough" development of abstract-expressionist painting and related color field works in the 1940s and 1950s. Such an exhibition would show in some depth the first American paintings which have transformed the development of world art. Beginning with Arshile Gorky, the exhibition would trace the development of abstract-expressionism in the widely diverse works of Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko, Newman, Still and other masters, and its direct outgrowth in the work of younger artists such as Frankenthaler

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and Francis and the later pure color fields of Louis, Noland and Olitski. Essentially, this phase is a more purely American phenomenon than later developments, and more recent art could be shown in a more international context (such as Pop Art, also being proposed at this time as an exhibition of both American and European artists). The present show would thus be thought of more as in the series of historical reviews of specific periods of modern art, than as an exhibition designed to present American art abroad as a national product.

The Museum of Modern Art's holdings in this area, including promised gifts, were shown in New York in 1969 and represent the finest collection of American art of this period anywhere. The exhibition would thus be dependent upon loans from the collection, but additional material would have to be borrowed from other museums and private collectors, especially to ensure adequate representation for Pollock, several of whose major works in the collection cannot travel because of inherent fragility, and possibly other artists as well.

SCHEDULE: Latin America - dates to be determined (1973?)

STATUS: Previously approved in principle by the International Council;  
new formulation submitted to Latin American Sub-Committee,  
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